ALABAMA LIBRARIES BEFORE 1920: A CHRONOLOGY IN PROGRESS

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This chronology covers events in Alabama history related to books, reading and libraries--book culture--up to about 1920. Some entries on archives and museums will also be included.

A bibliography of sources can be found at the end.

No claim of comprehensiveness is made. Additions/corrections are welcome.

Under perpetual construction. I am beginning to add information after 1920 as the mood strikes.

My blog post on "Alabama Libraries in 1886 and 1897":

http://alabamayesterdays.blogspot.com/2014/03/alabama-libraries-in-1886-and-1897.html

My blog post on "Two Early Medical Libraries in Birmingham"

http://alabamayesterdays.blogspot.com/2015/09/two-early-medical-libraries-in.html

My blog post on "Alabama Libraries in 1851"

http://alabamayesterdays.blogspot.com/2014/04/alabama-libraries-in-1851.html

My blog post "Alabama Library History: Bookmobiles"

http://alabamayesterdays.blogspot.com/2014/09/alabama-library-history-bookmobiles.html

I have also posted on the blog a number of other items about bookstores and libraries.

1540 July

Spanish explorer Hernando deSoto and his expedition enter what is now Alabama; among their supplies are some books. All the books are burned in the battle of Maubila on October 18, 1540. Several accounts of the expedition describe the destruction by de Soto's men of many of their own supplies as they tried to trap Native American forces. The burning included clothes, ornaments and chalices, wafer molds and wine for mass. The books destroyed may have been mostly religious in nature; the expedition's personnel included more than 20 priests, friars and clerics who surely carried along their Bibles. The longest account by Garcilaso de la Vega, *La Florida* [Clayton, Lawrence A., et al, eds. *The De Soto Chronicles.* University of Alabama Press, 1993, 2:95-96] observes that when the expedition left Cuba for Florida. "He took his fleet so well supplied with all kinds of provisions that one seemed to be rather in a very well-provisioned city than navigating on the sea."

1786

Don Juan Pedro Eon, cure and abbe of the district of Mobile, dies. The inventory of his estate reveals a private library of eighty-one books.

1807 September

A political pamphlet is published at Wakefield; this item is the first known printing in what is now Alabama. Wakefield no longer exists, but it has a prominent place in early American history. On February 19 of that same year former vice-president Aaron Burr was arrested in Wakefield as he attempted to flee to Spanish West Florida and escape President Jefferson's warrant.

1817

Public library movement begins in Huntsville.

1818 December 10

William Atwood purchases two shares of stock in the Huntsville Library Company. Certificates list Thomas G. Percy as President and Robert Fearn as Treasurer.

1819

During the assembly called to form the State of Alabama, James G. Birney gives notice that he will ask to incorporate the Huntsville Library Company.

1820s

Cahaba Female Academy is established early in this decade and includes a library.

1821

Green Academy is founded in Huntsville and exists until destroyed during the Civil War. The Cliosophic Society at the school develops a library.

1822

First books published in Alabama.

1823

Huntsville Library Company chartered by state legislature. Members: Thomas Fearn, Smauel Hazard, John Boardman, James G. Birney, George Fearn, Miles S. Watkins, Henry Minor and Thomas Brandon.

1828

The State Law Library is founded in Montgomery and has 14,000 volumes by 1874.

1829

Spring Hill College library opens and has 5000 items by 1876.

1829

Huntsville Female Seminary library founded; 3000 volumes are collected by 1876.

1831

University of Alabama library founded in Tuscaloosa and has 4000 volumes by 1876.

1835

Marion Female Seminary library founded and has 1000 volumes by 1876.

1835

Franklin Society Reading Room and LIbrary, a subscription institution, is founded in Mobile and has 3670 volumes by 1876.

1835-6

Alabama Institute of Literature and Industry at Marion, a Baptist school, applies most of its students' farm labor earnings to library purchases.

1836

Judson Female Institute library is founded and collects 3000 volumes by 1876.

1838

A catalog of the University of Alabama library collection is compiled by Richard Furman.

1841

Centenary Institute at Summerfield opens a library that has 1000 items by 1876.

1841

Howard College at Marion is established; the library has 1000 volumes by 1876.

1843

First official library in Montgomery organized 1843 in building on Court Square. Although of short duration, others followed. In 1898, Montgomery Library Association chartered as subscription library. In 1900, Andrew Carnegie, steel magnate, offered $50,000 for a building if property acquired; over $12,000 rapidly raised locally for lot at corner Perry and Adams. York and Sawyer of New York designed building with Frank Lockwood supervising architect for Beaux Arts structure. This was first free library. In 1959, Sherlock, Smith and Adams designed new building for Library and Fine Arts Museum at Lawrence and High. Racial integration took place in1962. With Museum's move to Blount Park in 1988, Library re-designed to better utilize space. In 2005, main facility renamed to honor civil rights advocate Juliette Hampton Morgan. Nine branches and the Morgan Library now serve the City and County. [Text of one side of the historical marker erected in 2008 by the Alabama Historical Association on the Montgomery City-County Public Library; marker is at High Street @ South Lawrence Street, Montgomery]

1847

Greene Springs School library is founded and has 2500 volumes by 1876.

1848

A catalog of the University of Alabama library is compiled by W.G. Richardson "on the plan of the Brown University catalog".

1849

Library begun at Wetumpka State Prison after reformer Dorothea Dix visits and donates books.

1850

Tuscaloosa Female College library founded and has 1200 volumes by 1876.

1850 March 4

The steamboat Orline St. John burns and sinks on the Alabama River in Wilcox County. On board was a book salesman and his stock.

1851

Alabama Historical Society is founded; the 1876 library report notes that the Society's 250 volume-library was donated to the University of Alabama.

1851

In 1851 Charles Coffin Jewett published one of the early inventories of public libraries in the United States. At the time Jewett was Librarian and Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution; he moved to the Boston Public Library as Superintendent in 1858 and worked there until his death a decade later. The report, *Notices of Public Libraries in the United States of America,* was issued as an appendix to the 1850 report of the Smithsonian's Board of Regents. In some 200 pages Jewett gives state-by-state library listings and descriptions. Listings are organized by town within each state. As might be expected, Jewett found through

his tedious methods of circulars and private correspondence only a few libraries in Alabama at that time. His first entry for the state, under "La Grange", says simply "*College Library*—3,000 *vols."* He refers of course to LaGrange College, the state's first chartered college established in 1830; the site is located eight miles southeast of Muscle Shoals. The college was burned in April 1863. From that brief entry Jewett moves on to Howard College, founded in Marion in 1842, with a library containing 1500 volumes. "It is opened once a week for half an hour", he notes. Organized by Alabama Baptists and chartered in 1841, Howard was moved to the East Lake area of Birmingham in 1887 and finally to its present location in Homewood in 1957 and renamed in 1965. In Mobile Jewett located the library of the Franklin Society, founded in January 1835. "The library contains 1,454 volumes, with a few coins and maps….The library and reading-room are open daily for the use of members of the society and subscribers to the reading-room." In Spring Hill, then outside of Mobile, Jewett found the state's second largest library of the time, that of the Catholic college holding 4,000 volumes. The school was founded twenty years before Jewett's report was published. He gives no other library details. Jewett's longest entry is the last, as expected the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa with 7,123 volumes. This figure included the 4,500 volumes in the "Rotundo" and two student libraries containing 2,623 volumes. He notes an annual circulation of some 800 volumes, a "stated annual appropriation of $200" and two extra $500 appropriations within the past five years. "The library is opened twice a week, and kept open about an hour each time." Jewett also mentions the two library catalogs that had been prepared by Richard Furman and Wilson G. Richardson. He notes that Richardson's effort "is on the plan of the catalogue of Brown University Library." In 1841 Jewett became librarian at Brown, reorganized its library and published a catalog in two parts: an alphabetical description of items and an alphabetical index of subjects. Thus Jewett found six "public libraries" in Alabama ca. 1850; he seems to have missed the one in Huntsville and probably others. By way of comparison, he found eight in Georgia, four in Mississippi and three in Florida.

1852

Synodical Female Collegiate Institute library in Talladega is founded and collects 300 volumes by 1876.

1853

Huntsville Female College library founded and has 575 volumes by 1876.

1854 February 15

First public school act passes Alabama legislature.

1855

Alabama Conference Female College library founded at Tuskegee and has 300 volumes by 1876.

1855

Florence Synodical Female College library founded and has 2500 volumes by 1876.

1859

A sixteen page catalog of the Alabama Supreme Court Library is published.

1859

Southern University at Greensboro library founded and collects 2000 volumes by 1876.

1860

Medical College of Alabama library founded in Mobile and has 500 volumes by 1876.

1860

Institution for the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind in Talladega begins a library that has 300 volumes in 1876.

1861

Columbian Institute, a mostly-male academy founded at Taylorville in Tuscaloosa County. The school includes a room dedicated to a library.

1865 April

University of Alabama library is burned by raiding Federal troops; only about 1200 volumes survive.

1869

The Law Library of Mobile is founded and grows to 3000 volumes by 1876.

1870 March 1

Huntsville Literary Debating Society is formed and includes a library for its members.

1871

University of Alabama is reorganized and rebuilding of library is begun.

1873

Agricultural and Mechanical College of Alabama in Auburn opens a library that has 1720 volumes three years later.

1873

State Normal School library at Florence opens and has 1000 volumes in 1876.

1873 (ca.)

Collecting of books for the Alabama Geological Survey Library begins.

1873 (ca.)

Alabama Historical Society establishes a library and archives, which are later donated to the University of Alabama library.

1874

Hamner Hall School for Boys founded in Montgomery and has 500 books in 1876.

1875

Talladega College library opens and has 300 volumes when surveyed the following year.

1875 (ca.)

Park High School in Tuskegee opens a library that has 400 volumes in 1876.

1875 (ca.)

Society library at Greene Springs founded and has 1500 volumes in 1876.

1875 (ca.)

YMCA library in Selma founded and has 600 volumes by 1876.

1875 (ca.)

Two society libraries founded in Marion and have 800 volumes by 1876.

1875 (ca.)

Two society libraries in Greensboro have 1500 volumes by 1876.

1875 (ca.)

The 1876 library report notes that society libraries at the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Alabama have a combined total of 2500 volumes.

1875 (ca.)

A society library founded at Gainesville has 700 volumes by 1876.

1878

Benjamin H. Riggs, outgoing secretary of the Medical Association of the State of Alabama, turns over to his successor T.A. Means 400 volumes of the society's library; by 1888 this figure had grown to more than 4000 and was in possession of the State Health Officer in Montgomery.

1882

Junius M. Riggs, librarian for the Alabama Supreme Court Library, publishes a catalog of the collection.

1882

Biennial report of the Alabama Insane Hospital 43 describes the workings of the patient library, which has a printed catalog. The librarian is described as "one of our most intelligent patients".

1883

Amelia Gayle Gorgas becomes director of the library at the University of Alabama and serves in that post until 1906.

1884

Birmingham Library Association founded. Raised funds through personal contributions and promotion of baseball games and within a year had accumulated 805 volumes. Collection was soon donated to the local school system and the association dissolved.

1885

Birmingham forms a public school system.

1886 (ca.)

Louisa Dodson Holmes establishes a library and reading room for school children in her house in Hayneville. Holmes was the local school teacher.

1886

Law library established at the University of Alabama

1888

Jefferson County forms a public school system.

1889

Bessemer forms public school system.

1890

Library operated by Order of Railroad Conductors, Montgomery.

1890 (ca.)

Dr. John H. Phillips, Birmingham Superintendent of Schools, establishes a library for teachers and students at the city's white high school using the book collection from the Birmingham Library Association.

1890s

Morgan County's first library, Cotaco Circulating Library, founded. Located in water works office, the library sold shares for $2.00 each, which entitled shareholders to check out books for a year and vote in the association.

1891

Highland Book Club founded in Birmingham.

1891

Library at Birmigham's white high school designated as Birmingham Public Library and opened to subscriptions. By 1899 this library has 6228 volumes and expenditures of $491.97

1891 June

Huntsville Circulating Library formed and located until August in Murray and Smith's Book Store. Library is then moved to the YMCA on Eustis Street. Mrs. V.A. Betts is librarian.

1892

Second annual report of the Selma City School Board is published and contains the catalog of the Dallas Male and Female Academy library. The Dallas Academy had been transformed into a Selma public school by act of the Alabama legislature on December 10, 1890.

1893

Helen Keller Library in Tuscumbia opens as result of efforts of the Helen Keller Library and Literary Association, organized in 1892. Library opens with 940 books and had 2000 by 1896. In early years the library opens two hours each Saturday morning, with members serving unpaid terms as librarians.

1893

Thomas McAdory Owen's collection of Alabama-related materials numbers over 2000 titles by this date. His collection--of unknown size--burns in 1906.

1893

Etta Matthews appointed librarian of the Huntsville Circulating Library. Conrad O'Shaughnessy is secretary- treasurer of the governing body. Membership in the library is $1.00 per year.

1894

Selma Library Association is formed. Small library financed by dues and donations opens in 1895. Eventually this library totals some 600 volumes which served as nucleus of the Carnegie library which opened in 1903 and which contained 3500 volumes by 1920.

1894

Public library formed in Fairhope.

1894

City Literary Club is founded in Cullman.

1894 September

Ladies Lyceum established in Union Springs, Alabama, in order to devlop a public library.

1895 (ca.)

The Southern Library Club in Florence is formed by a group of women; the organization includes a small library.

1895

Anniston public library association, headed by Howard W. Sexton, places a collection of books in Lloyd's Drug Store.

1895

Huntsville Circulating Library moves from YMCA on Eustis Street to the Gordon Building on Franklin Street.

1895

Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs is formed and begins effort to gain public and private support for libraries.

1895 April 1-3

Benefit balls are held for the Huntsville Circulating Library.

1896 February

Subscription library opens in Union Springs; membership fee is $2.00 per year. Collection of 332 books is classified, arranged and cataloged by Mollie Norman.

1897

Tuscumbia public library has been meeting at Deshler Female Institute. In this year library via third party buys the Opera House building. After two years of renovations, library moves to a portion of first floor. Second floor remains a town performance space. https://omeka.lib.auburn.edu/items/show/1508

1897 spring

Thursday Study Club is organized in Gadsden. This women's organization's efforts eventually leads to the dedication of a Carnegie library for the city in December l906.

1898

First gift from Andrew Carnegie to a town in Alabama. By 1920 Carnegie had donated over $195,000 in the state.

1898

Montgomery Library Association chartered as subscription library.

1898 November 3

Library for blacks in Birmingham opens in the Slater School. Collection contains 1100 volumes. Teachers could use it freely, but others were charged $2.00.

1899

Federation of Women's Clubs establishes a collection of about 25 bound volumes and 15 magazines to be circulated to any women's club requesting it. Transportation charge is one dollar and the collection can remain 3-4 months. By 1901 there are 12 of these libraries going to churches, schools, towns, etc. in addition to clubs. In 1903 the Alabama Educational Association Library Committee begins to find schools where these libraries can be used.

1900

Public library founded in Dothan.

1900

Andrew Carnegie, steel magnate, offered $50,000 for a building in Montgomery if property acquired; over $12,000 rapidly raised locally for lot at corner Perry and Adams. York and Sawyer of New York designed building with Frank Lockwood supervising architect for Beaux Arts structure. This was first free library in the city. [Taken from the text on one side of the historical marker erected in 2008 by the Alabama Historical Association on the Montgomery City-County Public Library; marker is at High Street @ South Lawrence Street, Montgomery]

Date unknown

Source: University Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

http://tinyurl.com/pqnvk5e

1900

Alabama Department of Education's Division of School Community Organization issues first "Library List for Elementary Schools" which appeared annually until about 1930.

1901 March 2

Alabama Department of Archives and History is organized by legislative act of February 27. A reference library will develop as a part of the activities of the department. Until 1940 the Archives was located in the Capitol building and materials were displayed in the State House and Senate chambers in Montgomery when the legislature was not in session.

This photograph shows collection materials displayed in the Senate chamber sometime before 1910.

These materials are displayed in the House chamber sometime before 1930.

Source for both of these Archives photos is the digital collections of the State Archives.

1901 (ca.)

One of the initial large gifts to the Alabama State Department of Archives and History is the 2500-piece library of J.L.M. Curry, donated by his heirs.

1901 October 14

Suggestion to create a library for members is made at a meeting in Birmingham of the Jefferson County Medical Society.

1901 November

Birmingham Medical Library Association is created for members of the Jefferson County Medical Society.

1902

Public library founded in Birmingham.

1902

Memorial Hall was built at the Confederate Soldiers' Home in Mountain View, Alabama, in Chilton County. The building included the commandant's office, a library, a parlor and a conference room. The second floor was used as an auditorium. Fire destroyed the building in 1924.

Source: *Encyclopedia of Alabama*

1903

Alabama Educational Association forms a Library Committee, which will draw up bills to present to the legislature, help organize libraries, etc.

1903

Carnegie library opens in Selma.

1904

State Superintendent of Education begins support of the school library movement by announcing that schools cannot adequately perform their function without good libraries.

1904

Thomas Owen attempts to count libraries in the state in non-educaitonal institutions.

1904 May 6

Eufaula's Carnegie Library opened; by the end of the year it had 4,789 books.

1904 November 21

First annual meeting of the Alabama Library Association takes place in Montgomery.

1905

Public library founded in Decatur.

1905

Alabama Library Association offers to assume responsibility for the Federation of Women's Clubs travelling libraries, and more than 1700 books, 9 bookcases and $9.81 were turned over to the Association.

1905

Thirty-seven out of sixty-seven counties have no school libraries; one in fifty schools in the state have a library of any kind.

1905

Mollie Norman reorganizes Union Springs subscription library according to the Dewey system.

1905

Public library founded in Livingston.

1905

State Superintendent of Education begins annual survey of libraries in educational institutions.

1905

Carnegie library organized in Decatur.

1906

Public library founded in Talladega.

1906 December 20

Gadsden Carnegie library dedicated.

1907

First serious consideration of library legislation by the state legislature results in the Library Act of 1907, which establishes the principle of state support for library services by authorizing and financing the Library Extension Divsion of the Department of Archives and History. This division was to operate a system of travelling libraries for the entire state. These mobile libraries would consist of 25-35 books sent to rural communities and schools for a period of up to four months; shipping and transportation costs were to be paid by recipients. Establishment of school and public libraries was to be encouraged and assisted, and a summer course in library instruction instituted.

1907

Survey of libraries not in public schools reveals that 90 such libraries exist in 53 municipalities; all but 22 were connected with educational institutions and seven were for blacks.

1907

Alabama State Department of Archives and History organizes a reference service for state legislators.

1907

Public library founded in Dadeville.

1907 April

"Magnificent" personal library of Dr. John Clark LaGrande, more than 300 volumes, is offered for sale in Birmingham. LaGrande died in March 1906.

1908

Public library founded in Bessemer.

1908

Alabama Educational Association declares that every child has a right to access to good books.

1908

First of three summer schools for library training organized by Thomas Owen. A total of 20 students were trained at their own expense during these three summers.

1908

Ladies Lyceum of Union Springs transfers control of its subscription library to the newly-chartered Union Springs Library Association.

1908 September 15

Talladega's Carnegie Library opened; the first book was checked out by an eight-year-old girl, Gentry Parsons.

1909

Alabama Teachers' and Young People's Reading Circle is formed.

1909 April

Union Springs Library Association petitions the city council for an annual appropriation to support its library's operating expenses. Council agrees to appropriate $1000 per year if a $10,000 building can be constructed to house a public library.

1909 October 1

Birmingham Public Library becomes a truely public, free library.

1909 November 4

Library Day in the public schools of Alabama.

1910

Union Springs Library Association makes initial contact with the Carnegie library program.

1910 November

Union Springs Library Association elects its first paid librarian--Mollie Norman. In February 1912 she issues her first annual report, noting that the library has 1200 volumes, is open five days a week for two hours per day and has circulated more than 1400 volumes on 199 borrower cards. Ms. Norman has three young ladies as unpaid apprentices.

1911

Rural School Library Law first proposed in 1907, is passed by Alabama legislature. Law provides for financial contributions from school districts, county and state for operation of public libraries. Amended in 1919. In 1911, 468 white school libraries held 83,152 volumes and 47 libraries in black schools held 3723 books out of a total of 6566 public schools in the state. By 1919 2135 white school libraries held 215,346 books and 131 black school libraries held 12,095 in 6459 public schools.

1913

Carl Milam accepts position of director, Birmingham Public Library, where he remains until late 1919.

1913 November 7

First meeting of the Carnegie Library Board in Huntsville is held.

1914

Public library is founded in Robertsdale.

1915

Legislature passes act requiring libraries to submit to Director of the State Department of Archives and History any information he may request.

1916

Survey indicates that fourteen of 125 high schools in the state had no library and most that did held under 100 books.

1916 February 29

Huntsville Carnegie Library opens to public.

1917

Birmingham Public Library director Carl Milam is instrumental in creating libraries in military training camps in Alabama.

These photos are exterior and interior shots of the library at Camp Sheridan near Montgomery taken in May and June 1918. More about Camp Sheridan can be found at the *Encyclopedia of Alabama.* These images of Camp Sheridan and Camp McClellan are from a National Archives collection of World War I photographs.

This photo shows the exterior of the library at Camp McClellan near Anniston, probably taken in 1918. The site later became Fort McClellan; you can learn more at the *Encyclopedia of Alabama.*

This photo was taken inside the library at Camp McClellan near Anniston, probably in 1918. The site later became Fort McClellan; you can learn more at the *Encyclopedia of Alabama.*

1918 October 9

Booker T. Washington Branch Library for blacks opens in Birmingham.

1918

City of Birmingham asked to gather 5000 books for distribution to soldiers; people gather 26,000.

1919

Library Act of 1919 permitted counties and municipalities to establish and operate free public libraries with tax monies under certain restrictions.

1920

Fairfield forms Board of Education for public school system.

1920

University of Alabama George Ketchum Medical Library is moved, along with the medical school, from Mobile to Tuscaloosa.

Source: BhamWiki

1925 April 23

Most of the collection of the Birmingham Public Library, located in the City Hall building constructed in 1901, was destroyed in a fire.

The BPL, then 12 years old, relocated to a new building that is now the Lynn-Henley Research Building.

1960 May:

Bertha P. Williams Library, Montgomery, opened May 1960

Listed on the Alabama Register of Historic Places 10/25/18

Source: Alabama Historical Commission Newsletter V4N2 Nov/Dec 2018

Listed for its association with African American heritage and architecture.

The need for a public library for the African-American community in Montgomery was expressed via the Montgomery Negro Ministerial Association. It was decided that the group would begin the Friends of the Library Association for the expressed purpose of pursuing a library for the community.

The first library was at the Montgomery City Federation of Colored Women's Club and it opened in 1948. Ms. Bertha Pleasant Williams was the first African-American employee of the Montgomery library system. She managed the library for the next 12 years. In May 1960, the

library board, through special funding from the City of Montgomery, opened the first freestanding public building for a library for African-American's on the west side of the city.

Mr. James Miller Davis, a graduate of Alabama Polytechnic Institute, designed a 5,228 square foot building to hold 15,750 volumes of material, including a meeting room to accommodate a meeting space for the community.

The Bertha P. Williams Library at the Rose L. Parks Avenue building is the second location of this "separate but equal facility" but is recognized as the first library for African-American citizens in Montgomery. On August 7, 1962 Judge Frank Johnson issued a decision settling the issue of access to "separate but equal" library service in Montgomery County and African-Americans were permitted to legally enter the downtown library.

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